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September 22, 1999

Mr. Lester Snow, Executive Director
CALFED BAY-DELTA PROGRAM
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1155
Sacramento CA 95814

Dear Mr. Snow:

The Programmatic Environmental Impact Report and Statement for the CALFED Bay-Delta program must be revised to firmly state its commitment to pursue non-engineering solutions to California's water problems during CALFED's "Stage 1" (the first seven years of the program). These solutions include increasing water conservation and efficiency, groundwater management, and true-cost pricing.

CALFED should not consider new or expanded dams, canals or reservoirs until after the first stage. Further, these options should only be studied after alternative solutions have been given an honest chance to work. Taxpayers should not subsidize these options. They are generally the most expensive and most environmentally damaging. We have for too long subsidized expensive dams and other water works, and it is time to put an end to this type of corporate welfare. We have shelled out billions of dollars to build dams and reservoirs to provide cheap water to agribusiness at an extremely high cost to our environment.

CALFED's top priority should be to reverse the decades of environmental devastation wrought by our massive plumbing system, and to invest in ways we can use our limited water more efficiently and thus reduce demand. After more than half a century of diverting most of the Bay's and rivers' waters to agriculture or municipalities, we have lost so many of our native fish runs and precious wildlife habitat. Now is the time rethink our strategy of more and bigger dams and longer canals. That strategy has brought us to where we are today, water shortages, pollution, failed economies, and far fewer fish. Instituting the same solutions that have caused the problems can not solve these problems. Thus, walking farther down our current path of concrete should not even be considered now.

The only way to improve the dilapidated conditions of our Bay-Delta and the tributary streams and rivers is to dedicate more water for environmental purposes. We have plenty of water; the question is how wisely we choose to use it. Irrigating low value crops on toxic lands is certainly not the wisest use of this water. Marginal farmlands should be retired and that water dedicated to fixing the environmental devastation agricultural toxic runoff has caused. Fallowing marginal and toxic lands, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley, could yield 420,000 to 2.1 million-acre feet of water annually.

We can secure even more water by instituting conservation methods that have proved successful in the past. Demonstration projects and creative farmers have shown us we can save between 25-50 percent of the water without sacrificing crop yields. Using technologies and methods available today, farmers, industries, and cities could each reduce water use by 10-30%,

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with no sacrifice of economic output or quality of life. Better irrigation efficiency could yield 340,000 to 1.7 million-acre feet of water. These methods must be aggressively pursued.

The only way to restore the Bay-Delta estuary is allow more freshwater flow to reach the ocean. California must cap and eventually reduce diversions of water from the Bay. However, CALFED has made negligible commitments to dedicating more water for environmental purposes. This document does not made clear how CALFED will obtain the water needed for real environmental restoration, nor has it quantified how much water will be needed to restore the Bay, our waterways, and the fish and wildlife depending on them. These components are vital and could be included in the Environmental Water Account.

The current description of the potential operation of an EWA indicates that EWA funds would be used to reimburse agriculture for reduced exports due to environmentally restricted pumping. This is not the intent of an Environmental Water Account and such language should not be included in the final document. Taking money from the EWA and using it to reimburse irrigators is a clear demonstration of priorities favoring irrigators over a healthy environment. That is clearly contradictory to the intent of CALFED.

The EWA should be used as a tool to gain more water for ecosystem restoration. The EWA should pursue the acquisition of water on top of water acquired for CVPIA b2 or other water already appropriated for environmental purposes. The EWA should be configured to establish a baseline of environmental of flows with any new flows used to supplement, not replace, existing flows.

Also, the document should specify that all natural tributaries contribute their fair ecological share to the Delta outflow. This will require fewer stream diversions and will help toward the restoration of these streams.

Further, CALFED efforts to restore fish runs in the Central Valley are severely lacking. Targets for restoring steelhead populations need to be increased in the long-term to greater than 40,000 fish. We know that steelhead populations exceeded 1 million fish before the major water projects were built. CALFED should use as its goal restoring fish population to the levels that existed just before the dams were created and water diversions begun. The government has an obligation to maintain our natural heritage; this includes our fish resources. A major failing of this document is lack of any reference to the Public Trust Doctrine. Also, CALFED must set water temperature targets, as well as stream flow targets, by the time of the final draft. Steelhead need very cool water, but are not guaranteed to get the cool water they need if CALFED relies only on stream flow targets.

Sincerely,

Darren Miller
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